

2022 Annual Report to the Benefice churches, April 2023

Revd Adrian Morton



Looking back over 2022

Worship (online and onsite)

It's been great to welcome Holly & Simon Horspole to the Benefice as Holly started her curacy with us in June 2022. This was the first year that weekly services returned to a more normal pattern following the pandemic. Easton Maudit continues to be a 'Book of Common Prayer (BCP)' enclave and now supported by a number of Bozeat worshippers. Strixton continues to offer a more traditional worship pattern for mainly Wollaston people (with some notable exceptions!) who prefer that style of worship. At Bozeat the contemporary service was stopped and worship reverted back to a more traditional style, albeit with the music group leading on alternate Sundays. Sadly, Jo Icke and family left for pastures new and since then the church council has been wrestling with how best to reach out to families. At Wollaston, the All-age service has had life breathed into it by the Bennett family and Pursuing His Presence returned led by Holly and members of the worship team. The 11am service continues to be live streamed weekly. Across all the churches, the carol services and Christingle returned with large numbers attending. It has also been good to have the weekly Tuesday evening prayer walking/in the pub times at Wollaston.

Ministry

Ministry to children has continued on Sunday morning at Wollaston. There is now an ecumenical (Anglicans, Baptist and Salvation Army) assembly team that do weekly assemblies at both Bozeat and Wollaston primary schools, which are well received by the schools. The Little Connections toddler group in Bozeat continues on Monday mornings and a new toddler group called 3Ts was launched on Tuesday mornings at Wollaston. Louise with a great team also started to run seasonal 'family events' to reach out to fringe families across the Benefice.

Ministry to secondary age children continues with the Youth cafe on Monday afternoons growing to cater for, on occasions, over 20 young people. The Monday evening discipleship group continues to attract good numbers, and included running youth Alpha. Sarah with her team also reach out to young people in Bozeat via regular fire pit evenings. Louise and Sarah also continue to support the secondary school in Wollaston providing lunch time support and after school support at the homework club.

Ministry to adults is varied outside of Sunday mornings. There are a number of weekly 'drop-in' activities - 3Cs (Coffee, Cake & Chat) on Wednesday mornings at Wollaston, and 'Time for You' on Friday afternoons at the Little Chapel in Bozeat. These together with other regular events across the benefice, e.g. the Health & Wellbeing group, Film nights, Social events, Mother's Union and others has meant there have been numerous opportunities for both fellowship and serving & reaching out to the wider community. St. Mary's Wollaston hosted a 'Faithwalkministries' conference in the Autumn during which a number of people were baptised. Also, a ministry at Wellingborough prison started to get established, led by Ivor Emmanuel. Ivor has built up a good relationship with the prison and regularly goes in to support some of the prison's work. Also a group from the Benefice went in and helped to lead a carol service in December.

So many people get involved to both support the upkeep of our ancient buildings and also in the various ministries that happen in and around church. There are too many to mention here, but I will endeavour to thank people at the individual annual meetings that take place over the coming weeks and months.

p.t.o.

Looking forward...

I don't envisage too much change in terms of worship style and patterns over the coming year. I'm sure Easton Maudit and Strixton will continue to offer particular styles of worship that enable the Benefice to offer a variety of worship experiences that will appeal to all ages. Bozeat will continue to wrestle with how to reach out effectively to families. Led by Chris & Linda Brett, a 'Friends of St. Mary's Bozeat (FOSMB)' was recently launched to help with costs associated with the building. It will be interesting to see what spin offs there are with this initiative. Linda Brett will shortly re-start 'Open House' on Tuesday mornings as one way to reach out to families with younger children.

After 5 years the church away weekend is again happening at Sizewell Hall in Suffolk at the end of April 2023 with over 80 adults & children booked in.

In addition to the various ministries already happening, a new Alpha course will start in Bozeat on Wednesday 17th May, led by Chris Brett and the team. Holly & Simon Horspole are soon to start a new discipleship group for older teens and young adults. Andy & Denise Major are looking to run a second Bereavement Journey course building on a successful opening course that ran in March.

At Wollaston, a decision will soon be made regarding the proposed extension. Much work behind the scenes has already been done by the building committee. We are now at a crucial stage to decide whether to proceed with the project. The costs have gone up enormously compared to the initial estimate when the project started. Whilst there are monies already in the fund (approx. £214k) from the sale of the parochial rooms, an equivalent amount will need to be raised. The intention is to have a prayer meeting on the evening of Tuesday 16th May. Following this, at the Sunday morning service on the 24th May (Pentecost), the church community will be asked to indicate their support of the project by pledging funds towards the project cost. The next church council meeting on the 19th June will make the decision to proceed or not.

In the Autumn of 2023, on Saturday 11th November, we will be welcoming Patrick Reegan OBE to Wollaston as part of his 'Brighter Days' tour. Patrick is CEO and co-founder of the mental health and wellbeing charity Kintsugi Hope (<https://kintsugihope.com/>). Following this evening and under the leadership of Holly and Chris Brett we will need to decide how to engage both the benefice church community and also our wider communities with this important subject.

You may have heard that the Church of England have recently approved the use of some liturgy that will mean priests will be permitted to bless the civil marriages of same sex couples. Whether they will be used in a particular church will be decided by each local church council in conjunction with the vicar. The whole area of sexuality and gender has been a thorny issue within the church for a number of years, and I have deliberately avoided tackling the issue as a church. However, with the introduction of this liturgy I'm not sure it can now be avoided. I am therefore proposing that as a church we start to engage with this, but not until next year. My current thinking is to have a Lent course next year that will help us disagree well with each other, and then have some form of teaching/discussion evening early next Spring. My hope is that, as a church, we are able to hold different perspectives, disagree well, yet still love one another strongly.

Louise and I are planning to take a sabbatical from September to November this year. This means we shall be away for 3 months. Holly, with support from the Revd Margaret Johnson, will have the primary leadership role within the Benefice during this period.

Finally, for all that is unseen and seen, we give God the glory,

With blessing,
Adrian